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‘Serious Security Threat’: Beijing Claims US Spy Planes Posed as Airliners Over 100 Times in 2020

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

In light of increased attention being brought on the activities of US spy planes near China, Beijing has accused the US of disguising them as civilian airliners more than 100 times in 2020 alone, calling the practice a “serious security threat” and warning it poses a danger to actual civilian aircraft.

Several times over the last few weeks, [observers have noticed US intelligence aircraft seeming to “disappear”](#) in mid-flight on international flight-tracking programs, only to be replaced by what seems to be a civilian aircraft broadcasting what turns out to be a fake transponder code. These “civilian” aircraft then fly typical spy plane routes, patrolling intensively over an area for several hours, before mysteriously turning back into US spy planes on their return flights.

On September 16, a Chinese government official confirmed those suspicions, saying the US has made the practice routine over the last year.

“It is the old trick of the US military to use a transponder code to impersonate civil aircraft of other countries,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson [Wang Wenbin told reporters last Wednesday](#).

“According to incomplete data, since the beginning of this year, the US reconnaissance aircraft have electronically impersonated civil aircraft of other countries in the South China Sea for more than a hundred times. This above-mentioned practice is egregious, which has severely violated international aviation rules, disrupted the aviation order and safety in relevant airspace, threatened the security of China and countries in the region. China firmly opposes that,” he said. “We urge the US side to immediately stop such dangerous, provocative behaviors to avoid accidents in the air and at sea. China will continue work with regional countries to firmly safeguard the freedoms and safety of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea as well as the peace and stability in the region,” Wang added.

[A September 18 report by the South China Sea Probing Initiative](#) (SCSPI), a think tank connected to Peking University, further corroborated the claims by citing multiple, independently verified sources that arrived at the same conclusions.

The practice has continued since: on September 21, a US Air Force RC-135W Rivet Joint signals intelligence aircraft, built by Boeing and based on a modified version of its 707 passenger aircraft, was spotted using a fake transponder hex code to fly through the South China Sea near China’s Hainan Island and the Paracel Islands, China’s claims of control over which are disputed by Vietnam.

Then on Tuesday, an RC-135S Cobra Ball, an aircraft specialized for observing ballistic missile launches, flew from the US Air Force’s Kadena Air Base on Okinawa, Japan, bound for the Yellow Sea, where it, too, adopted a bogus hex code, [as multiple observers confirmed](#).

Hilariously, a KC-135 Stratotanker was even spotted flying out to refuel this aircraft that was supposedly not a US spy plane. The refueler didn't bother to disguise itself, however. [The South China Morning Post reported on September 19](#) that an unnamed source had told the paper about a US Air Force E-8C spy plane doing the same thing near the coast of China's Guangdong Province, which faces the South China Sea. The report did not say when the incident took place. The E-8 is also modified from a Boeing 707 airliner and resembles it closely. Another observer recorded a US Air Force RC-135U Combat Sent, which collects information on radar arrays, [broadcasting a fake hex code in the Black Sea](#) off the coast of Russia's constituent Republic of Crimea on September 21. It was one of several aircraft watching [Russia's Kavkaz-2020 drills](#).

[As Sputnik reported, the US spy planes must be turning off](#) their International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) transponders, which broadcast unique information about the aircraft to other planes as well as receivers on the ground in hexadecimal format. They then turn on another transponder, making it look like they're really another plane in the sky. For many of the US' intelligence-gathering aircraft, like the RC-135W Rivet Joint and E-8C Joint STARS, the masquerade is only helped by their exterior appearances, which closely resemble a civilian airliner.

When asked about the practice, US Air Force [Gen. Kenneth Wilsbach, the commander of Pacific Air Forces, only said](#) that "we follow the rules for international airspace, and we were following the rules that day."

Technically this is true. Steffan Watkins, an open-source intelligence researcher based in Ontario, Canada, noted on Twitter that Wilsbach's statement amounts to an admission, despite his attempts to dissimulate.

"He's confirming that yes, they do whatever they want in international airspace, because there is no law preventing them from changing their ICAO hex mid-flight," Watkins wrote. "He's also right, it wasn't an isolated occurrence; the #USAF has done so many times before. See, as a state aircraft they can do whatever they want. They're not *breaking* any laws, because they're above the law, essentially. See how that wordplay works?"

Indeed, [the ICAO's regulations specifically note that they](#) "are not applicable to State aircraft (military, police or customs) in general," and that "there are no requirements for State aircraft to comply with civil requirements in international airspace," but also notes that it "requires States to ensure that military aircraft do not endanger civil aircraft."

Since Malaysia seems to be the nation of choice for US spy planes to disguise themselves as being from, it's possible Kuala Lumpur could claim the US is unreasonably endangering its civil aircraft by doing so. The southeast Asian nation has historically had close economic ties with China, but in recent years Washington has [attempted to drive a wedge between them using their competing claims](#) over parts of the South China Sea.

In May, the US [delivered the first six of 12 ScanEagle unmanned surveillance aircraft](#) to the Royal Malaysian Navy, which will be used for maritime patrols.

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US Air Force Reveals B-1B Lancer Readiness Rate Has Tripled Since Last Year
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

In the past year, the US Air Force has considerably improved the functionality of its B-1B Lancer bomber fleet, tripling the number of aircraft available for flying on a given day.

In August 2019, US Strategic Command chief Gen. John Hyten told federal lawmakers that because of extensive wear and tear, just seven of the US Air Force's 62 B-1B Lancer bombers were available for missions. Thirteen months later, Gen. Tim Ray, head of Air Force Global Strike Command, has revealed that number has tripled.

"On any given day, I probably can fly well over 20 of the B-1s," Ray told reporters during the Air Force Association's virtual Air, Space & Cyber [conference on September 16, Military.com reported](#). "[It's] probably six or seven months ahead of where we thought it would be."

In February, the Air Force [indicated in budget requests its desire to save costs](#) by sending 17 of the worst-condition Lancers to the "boneyard," a long-term storage location for aircraft, which would reduce the Lancer fleet to just 44 bombers.

[As Sputnik has reported, the Air Force has changed the Lancer's role](#) several times over the course of its 40-year life. The plane was originally designed for low-altitude, supersonic dashes into enemy territory to deliver a nuclear attack, but after the end of the Cold War, the Lancers were reimagined as gigantic close air support aircraft, using their huge fuel tanks and bomb bays to loiter over the battlefields of Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria for hours as they waited to deliver airstrikes in support of US-allied ground forces.

Now, the Lancers are getting a third life as ["missile trucks," receiving modifications to carry a slew of long-range missiles](#) that include anti-ship missiles and hypersonic weapons. Several Lancers have been dispatched to Guam in recent months, from which they fly maritime patrols over the South China Sea and Philippine Sea, where Chinese naval forces commonly drill.

The Air Force has [dispatched Lancers to other places, too](#), part of its new mission to keep US adversaries on their toes by suddenly having US forces appear in unexpected locations.

"There is no better example of dynamic force employment than the Bomber Task Force capacity that we've been able to do in support of many, many countries and allies," Ray said Wednesday. "It's something we're going to absolutely continue to do."

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US Strategic Command Flexes on Russian Air Force With Bomber Flights Tweet
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

In a recent tweet, US Strategic Command (STRATCOM) reasserted its own long-range bomber capabilities after Russia's air force boasted of a bomber mission that lasted more than a whole day.

On Monday, STRATCOM posted "a little #MondayMotivation to show what teamwork can accomplish" on its Twitter account, listing missions flown by its B-1B Lancer, B-52 Stratofortress and B-2 Spirit strategic bombers that lasted dozens of hours each.

However, this info-drop wasn't out of the blue: last week, Lt. Gen. Sergey Kobylash, commander of the Russian Aerospace Forces' Long-Range Aviation division, [boasted that two of its Tu-160 White Swan bombers](#) (NATO reporting name "Blackjack") had flown 25-hour nonstop flights. "Today, a new record for range and flight duration was set by two long-range flight crews on Tu-160 supersonic strategic missile carriers. The Russian Aerospace Forces pilots were in the air for more than 25 hours and covered more than 20,000 kilometers [12,400 miles]," Kobylash said.

Flying from Engels in western Russia's Saratov Oblast, the huge white bombers flew a circuitous route that covered the northerly Kara, Laptev, East Siberian, Chukchi and Barents Seas, as well as parts of the Arctic and Pacific Oceans, before returning to Engels. Kobylash didn't say when the flights had happened.

"dynamic force employment" practice, [sending its bombers on world-spanning hikes](#) to suddenly appear near places of geostrategic significance. One mission saw a B-1B Lancer, a rough analogue to the White Swan, soar for 24 hours from South Dakota [to take part in live-fire drills in Estonia](#), just a few miles from the Russian border.

In another incident, two Lancers flew 30 hours from South Dakota [to drill with Japanese forces near the Democratic People's Republic of Korea](#) (DPRK), whose leader, Kim Jong Un, was widely rumored at the time to have disappeared. In a third, [two B-2 Spirit stealth bombers and four B-52 Stratofortress](#) strategic bombers were suddenly dispatched from the US to the European and Indo-Pacific theaters.

By comparison, Russian long-range flights are few and far between. Last year, [two Tu-160s flew to South Africa](#), and [the year prior, two flew to Venezuela](#); on both occasions, the planes landed at their destinations. But then, Russia has never waged a war far from its borders, whereas the United States has been in the business of bombing far-away countries for nearly three-quarters of a century, so perhaps that kind of specialization comes with the territory.

However, if Moscow wanted to boast, in 2010, two Tu-95 bombers (NATO reporting name "Bear") [flew 43-hour nonstop missions across the entire Arctic region](#), nearly equal to STRATCOM's most extreme brags.

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'They Deserved Better': DC National Mall Covered in US Flags in Memory of COVID-19 Deaths - Photos
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The area around the Washington Monument has been covered in 20,000 miniature US flags, each representing 10 deaths from the COVID-19 novel coronavirus in the United States. With just 4% of the world's population, the US is responsible for 20% of all COVID-19 deaths. A grim memorial has been added to the central green in Washington, DC: 20,000 US flags now dot the landscape surrounding the Washington Monument, commemorating the passing of more than 200,000 Americans from the COVID-19 pandemic.

[According to NBC, the memorial was created](#) by a group of friends from the Washington, DC, area who crowdfunded the money for the flags. About two dozen volunteers began planting the flags on Monday morning, helped by many passersby.

One sign next to the impromptu memorial reads: "In memory of the 200,000+ Americans who have needlessly lost their lives to COVID-19." Another says, "200,000 dead. They deserved better."

However, the total death count in the US is in all likelihood far higher. The pandemic hasn't just killed Americans through infection with the respiratory virus, but also through starvation, poverty, eviction, exposure and simply sheer despair.

On August 12, when the death toll attributed to the novel coronavirus was about 140,000, [the New York Times reported that a total of 200,000](#) more deaths had occurred in 2020 than would normally have occurred had there been no pandemic. In other words, another 60,000 had died during the pandemic, but not from COVID-19. However, [researchers have also noted the difficulties in definitively attributing](#) cause of death to COVID-19 for people who had the disease. "It's just incomprehensible, the situation we find ourselves in," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said at the memorial on Tuesday. "This was preventable. Not all of it, but much of it," she said, adding that the flags offer "some perspective on the number of lives that have been lost."

US President Donald Trump has once again come under intense scrutiny for his handling of the pandemic, in particular its opening stages in early 2020. Earlier this month, [journalist Bob Woodward revealed that Trump said he knew](#) the dangers posed by the virus long before they were made known to the public; [Trump responded that he "perhaps" played down](#) the threat, in the interests of preventing a general panic.

In early February, when the outbreak was still confined to China, [he repeatedly suggested it was a minor threat](#) compared even to influenza and assured the US public the government had it under control. Three months later, on May 24, the US registered its 100,000th death to the virus, [which the New York Times called "an incalculable loss."](#)

Asked about the 200,000 milestone on Tuesday, [Trump told reporters outside the White House](#) that "if we didn't do it properly," the US would have lost 2.5 million people instead. [Early estimates from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) suggested that, without implementing mass shutdowns to "flatten the curve" of COVID-19 infections, the US could have seen between 200,000 and 1.7 million deaths - the former of which the US has reached nonetheless.

Globally, 966,500 people have died from COVID-19 and 31.4 million people have been infected, [according to data collected by the New York Times.](#)

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Playful Alpaca Invades UK Football Match - Video Club

A match between two UK community football teams was recently momentarily halted after a pitch invader decided to make an appearance; however, this wasn't your typical shirtless invader - this time it was an alpaca.

Video captured by local resident Claire Armstrong shows the weekend game between clubs Carlton Athletic and Ilkley Town at a complete pause, as the brown-haired alpaca comes storming through.

"After about 15 minutes of it parading around the farmer eventually turned up with some food to try and tempt it back home," Armstrong, who is an Ilkley Town club member, [told video licensor Storyful](#). "It eventually gave in and was escorted off the field of play and the game resumed." Now, how long will it be before Ilkley adopts the alpaca as their new mascot?

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Videos: Body Camera Shows US Cop Shoot Autistic Teen Multiple Times During Foot Chase by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Utah's Salt Lake City Police Department released a slew of body camera footage on Monday, providing further insight into the September 4 police-involved shooting of 13-year-old Linden Cameron.

The footage, which was released as part of the city's policy to release video of police shootings within 10 business days of their occurrence, includes the initial 911 call made by Cameron's mother and [recordings](#) from [different vantages](#) that were captured by responding officers.

Recordings show that when Golda Barton, Cameron's mother, dialed 911, she requested that a crisis intervention officer be dispatched to her home. Barton told the dispatcher that her autistic, teenage son was "out of control" and was having a mental health episode. The call to law enforcement was meant to get her help in transporting her son to a medical facility.

"He's sick," she told the dispatcher. "He needs to go to the hospital."

Barton informed the official that her son had previously had run-ins with officers, noting that he'd led cops on a chase and been in a "shootout" with a police agency in nearby Nevada.

Additionally, Barton indicated that he might have "some type of a gun" on his person, and that officers are a "trigger" for Cameron.

Once officers arrived at the home, Cameron ran away and into the Glendale neighborhood.

Video shows several officers, some of whom are questioning how best to respond to the situation, searching for the teenager. Although Cameron is eventually found following a brief foot chase, he's shot multiple times within moments of being given orders by an officer.

"I don't feel good. I don't feel good," Cameron is heard saying after being shot. "Tell my mom I love her."

Upon a search of the scene, police never found a firearm.

A [GoFundMe page](#) run by a family friend indicated that Cameron has injuries to his shoulder, ankles, intestines and bladder. "The long term effects of his injuries are still unknown, but it is likely that his recovery will be long and require multiple kinds of treatment," the page reads.

Barton [spoke with local news station KUTV Sunday](#) and questioned the officers' decision-making. "He's a small child. Why didn't you just tackle him? He's a baby. He has mental issues."

Wesley Barton, Cameron's older brother, [told the Salt Lake Tribune](#) that his younger brother only ran away from police because he was scared, adding that seeing the recordings was "horrible."

"To see your little brother bleeding out, saying his last words. It plays in my head over and over," he said.

Wesley further told the outlet that his younger brother, who has lost feeling in one of his arms, isn't likely to walk normally again.

Salt Lake City Police Chief Mike Brown and Salt Lake City Mayor Erin Mendenhall issued prepared remarks on Monday regarding the release of the body camera recordings; however, neither official directly addressed the incident as a result of ongoing investigations.

"As a member of this community and the mother of a 14-year-old boy, I am profoundly heartbroken and I am frustrated," Mendenhall said. "This shooting is another tragedy."

Sim Gill, the Salt Lake City district attorney, is expected to review the case and make a decision in the coming days on whether the officer was justified in discharging his department-issued firearm.

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COVID-19 Could Cause Global Declines in Life Expectancy, Study Finds

A new study suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic could cause declines in life expectancy in many regions of the world.

Using a computer model, researchers involved in the [study](#) at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Laxenburg, Austria, simulated the probabilities of contracting COVID-19, dying from the virus and dying for another reason during a one-year period. The researchers then calculated the impact of COVID-19 on life expectancy. Through the model, they determined that infection rates of 2% would cause a drop in life expectancy in countries where average life expectancy is high. The decline would be even greater at higher infection rates.

"At 10% prevalence, the loss in life expectancy is likely to be above one year in high life-expectancy countries such as those in Europe and North America. At 50%, it would translate into three to nine years of life lost in high life-expectancy regions. In less developed regions, the impact is smaller given that there is already lower survival at older ages," study leader Guillaume Marois, a researcher at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, [told UPI](#).

Specifically, the study found that a 50% prevalence of COVID-19 infection could cause life expectancy to drop by three to nine years in North America and Europe, three to eight years in Latin America and the Caribbean, two to seven years in Southeastern Asia and one to four years in sub-Saharan Africa.

"However, even in the most affected regions, the life expectancy will likely recover once the pandemic is over," Marois added.

According to study co-author Sergei Scherbov, it took Europe decades for its average life expectancy to increase by six years, from 72.8 years in 1990 to 78.7 years in 2019.

"COVID-19 could thus set back this indicator in 2020 to the values observed some time ago," Scherbov noted.

"However, we do not know what is going to happen further. In many countries fatality from COVID is strongly decreasing, probably because the protocol of COVID treatment became better defined," he added.

The study's findings come as the US' COVID-19 death toll surpassed 200,000. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the [current life expectancy in the US is 78.6 years](#).

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ISS Crew Successfully Dodges 'Unknown' Space Debris With Avoidance Maneuver

Flight controllers in Mission Control Houston, along with the US Space Command, successfully avoided a collision with a piece of space debris that passed within several kilometers of the International Space Station (ISS).

According to [NASA](#), an avoidance maneuver took place using the Russian Progress resupply spacecraft while astronauts aboard the ISS take shelter inside their Soyuz spacecraft.

"Using the ISS Progress 75 thrusters and with NASA and Russian flight controllers working in tandem, the International Space Station conducted a 150-second reboost Tuesday afternoon at

5:19 p.m. EDT to avoid a possible conjunction with an unknown piece of space debris," [NASA said in a post](#).

Due to safety concerns, three Expedition 63 crew members moved to the Russian segment of the station to be closer to their Soyuz MS-16 spacecraft. However, no crew members were in danger at any point in time.

"Once the avoidance maneuver was completed, the crew reopened hatches between the U.S. and Russian segments and resumed their regular activities," NASA confirmed.

Last week, a small ammonia leak was detected in the US segment of ISS. However, the incident posed no threat to crew members.

"Experts have registered an ammonia leak outside the US segment of the ISS. We are speaking about the leak with the speed of some 700 grams [1.5 pounds] per year. But there is no threat to the ISS crew," [a Roscosmos source told Sputnik](#).

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Photos: US Surfer's Lost Board Floats From Hawaii to The Philippines

Doug Falter, a photographer and surfer who lost his surfboard in Hawaii back in 2018, was astounded to recently learn that his board was found in the Philippines, around 5,200 miles away.

"I was really upset as I managed to catch the biggest waves of my life on this board," Falter [wrote in a 2018 Facebook post](#). "That's why it meant so much to me."

However, in a post last month, Falter revealed that the surfboard had been found by Giovanne Branzuela floating near Sarangani, a province in the Philippines located in the Soccsksargen region.

Branzuela is an aspiring surfer and a primary school teacher.

"As bummed as I was when I lost it, now I am happy to know my board fell into the hands of someone wanting to learn the sport. I couldn't imagine a better ending to this story than to see the sport of surfing begin in a place where nobody surfs," Falter [wrote last month](#).

"If it weren't for travel restrictions I would have raised money to bring boards for learning and surf supplies and be on a plane to go and visit Giovanne. I could teach him how to surf and hopefully a few of his 144 students. He is in charge of a school on the islands where my board is and I'm sure some of the kids would love to learn," Falter added.

Branzuela, who purchased the surfboard from his neighbor a couple of months ago, said that a fisherman had found the board in the sea in August 2018, six months after Falter lost it. The teacher has offered to return the board to Falter once COVID-19-related travel restrictions have been lifted, and for his part, Falter intends to give Branzuela a beginner's surfboard, [AFP reported](#).

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US Charter School Teacher Fired for Wearing 'Black Lives Matter' Face Covering

Lillian White, a Texas charter school teacher, was recently fired after she refused to stop wearing a mask bearing the words "Black Lives Matter."

White, an art teacher at Great Hearts Western Hills in San Antonio, was fired from her job a week before students were set to return to class because she attended in-person training sessions with homemade face coverings printed with the phrases "Black Lives Matter" and "Silence is Violence," local outlet KENS-TV reported.

"It was really stressful because I have a financial obligation to help support my family," White told the station. "It's also kind of heartbreaking that this is the kind of - this is the reason that I lost my job."

"For about a week and a half I was wearing these masks and no one said anything. A couple of the other teachers came up and asked for some if I had any extras and I made them some," White, who has worked in the education field for over a decade, told the outlet.

White on Friday received a text message from the school's assistant principal informing her that they would like her to stop wearing the masks. The text read: "We'd like you to stop wearing these masks anymore, parents will be coming around more and we don't discuss the current political climate," White told the station.

However, White continued to wear the masks, resulting in her termination.

"This is human rights and it should be something that is promoted at our school. It's an excuse to not talk about it by saying this is politics, talk about it on your own time. It's just an excuse because they're uncomfortable with the conversation," White explained.

In a statement to KENS-TV, Great Hearts Texas Superintendent Daniel Scoggin indirectly addressed White's firing.

"Great Hearts respects the privacy of all current and former employees and as a result does not issue public comment on specific personnel matters. On the question related to face coverings, Great Hearts enacted, in this unprecedented pandemic environment, a policy that face coverings have no external messages. This policy was authored by school leaders and teachers in service to the learning environment of our classrooms."

"Great Hearts was founded and exists today to serve the innate dignity and worth of every human being. We stand with the Black community and all who are suffering. Great Hearts deplores bigotry and its crushing effects on all those subjected to it. Great Hearts is committed to an America where racism, violence, and injustice do not happen because such acts find no home in the hearts of a great people," the statement adds.

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'A War Machine With a Country Attached': US Pandemic Relief Revealed as Diverted to Defense Firms

A Tuesday Washington Post article revealed the US Congress gave the Pentagon \$1 billion in March to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, that money has mostly been paid to

defense contractors, further growing the US war machine, according to medical doctor Dr. Yolandra Hancock and investigative journalist Daniel Lazare.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed by Congress earlier this year provided the Pentagon with money to “prevent, prepare for and respond to coronavirus.” However, according to the [article](#), that money was allocated under the Defense Production Act, which allows US President Donald Trump and the Defense Department to direct US companies to manufacture products for national security purposes.

Around \$183 million was handed to firms like Rolls-Royce and ArcelorMittal to maintain the shipbuilding industry, while millions went toward satellite, drone and space surveillance technologies. Around \$80 million was given to an aircraft parts business impacted by the Boeing 737 Max 8 grounding, and another \$2 million was allocated toward a domestic Army uniform fabric manufacturer, according to the Post, which noted some 30 firms received the money in all.

“It [the Pentagon] was able to do it because no one was there to stop. It’s extraordinary that Congress doesn’t do anything to stop this breach of legislative instruction. Congress stipulated how the money would be spent and now is doing nothing, even though its orders were contradicted,” Lazare, who is the author of “The Velvet Coup,” told [Political Misfits hosts Michelle Witte and Bob Schlehuger on Tuesday](#).

“Essentially this was supposedly what was being fought out in the impeachment of Trump back in January, but the whole issue was muddled by the question of foreign policy and Ukrainian relations,” he noted.

“But this is far more serious ... and a far more serious breach of constitutional responsibility, but it also shows America is increasingly a war machine with a country attached. The Pentagon takes precedence, incredible amounts of money are invested in the military ... yet the health and well-being of the country at large is increasingly going downhill. So it seems to me that America’s priorities are grossly misplaced,” Lazare said.

“It’s just a complete reversal of normal priorities,” he added.

According to the Post, at least 10 of the contractors who were paid by Defense Production Act funding also received money from the Paycheck Protection Program, which extended funds to companies whose revenues were hurt by the COVID-19 pandemic so they could continue to afford keeping their workers on their payroll.

Meanwhile, health officials are still hunting for COVID-19 response funding, including \$6 billion for future vaccine distribution.

“How about you ensure the 33 million Americans who don’t have health insurance as of today, because of the pandemic and because of the broken health care system? That’s where I would start. The second is addressing food insecurity across this country,” Hancock, a board-certified pediatrician and obesity medicine specialist, told Sputnik.

“It’s politics and profits over people all day long, and unfortunately that’s what we’re seeing throughout this pandemic ... You see disproportionate impact of economic downturn within communities of color,” she added.

In a statement to the Post, Ellen Lord, the undersecretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment, defended the Pentagon’s actions.

“We are thankful the Congress provided authorities and resources that enabled the [executive branch] to invest in domestic production of critical medical resources and protect key defense

capabilities from the consequences of COVID. We need to always remember that economic security and national security are very tightly interrelated and our industrial base is really the nexus of the two.”

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Video: Scotland Yard Releases CCTV Footage in Hunt For Stolen James Bond Guns
by [Evan Craighead](#)

London’s Metropolitan Police Service filed a new appeal on Monday requesting witnesses for its ongoing probe into a north London burglary which included the theft of five guns previously used in the James Bond film franchise.

“We now have images of a vehicle that was parked near to the scene of the crime and appears to be carrying out reconnaissance in the area,” Detective Inspector Paul Ridley of North Area Criminal Investigation Department said, as quoted by the Metropolitan Police’s [Monday news release](#).

At first glance, the video, recorded around 8:00 p.m. local time on March 23, appears to show nothing, but the point of focus appears to be the silver Vauxhall Minerva parked with its headlights on in the right-hand background.

“In scenes reminiscent of a James Bond movie you can even see the flash of a camera from the occupant engaged in the surveillance. I believe these individuals were involved in the crime, it was only a matter of minutes prior to the raid,” he pointed out.

“The firearms which were stolen are very distinctive and will almost certainly be recognized by the public and anyone who is offered them for sale,” Ridley noted.

“The owner of these unique items is devastated, particularly in terms of the sentimental value - they were due to be showcased on display as part of a national exhibition.”

The guns stolen are one Beretta “Cheetah” semiautomatic pistol with the serial number H02641Y; one Walther PP with the serial number 146872; one Smith & Wesson 44 Magnum revolver with the serial number N60304; one Beretta “Tomcat” semiautomatic pistol with the serial number DAA264306; and one Llama 22-caliber pistol with the serial number 271915.

All five of the weapons have been deactivated, according to the release.

The current suspects are said to be “three white men with eastern European accents.”

Authorities noted that they were all wearing face coverings and dark clothing at the time of the burglary.

Six months after the incident, only one weapon, the Llama pistol used in “Die Another Day,” has been returned. The deactivated weapon was located “by a member of the public in a field near to Roydon Railway Station in Essex in April,” authorities said.

“I would urge any members of the public that may have witnessed the suspects arriving and leaving, know where the firearms are now, or may have been offered these stolen items for sale, to come forward to my investigation team as a priority,” Ridley concluded in the release, which includes additional images of the stolen guns.

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Photo: Amazon Promptly Removes 'Black Lives Don't Matter' Hat Following Backlash
by [Evan Craighead](#)

International online marketplace Amazon has found itself at the center of another racist merchandise debacle after allowing a third-party vendor to sell trucker hats emblazoned with "Black Lives Don't Matter."

"THIS IS NOT OK," Alexandra Wilson, a criminal and family barrister from Essex, England, said in a Twitter post condemning the dehumanizing trucker hat on sale via IMERIOi for £12.96 (\$16.51).

"Multiple people reported it, and racist material should be removed immediately," Wilson [told the BBC](#).

"Websites like Amazon definitely need to have better checks in place for both their descriptions and photos because this isn't the first time something like this has happened."

Wilson was not the only netizen who was quick to call out the UK Amazon website. Dr. Shola Mos-Shogbamimu, a lawyer and founder of the Women in Leadership Publication, slammed the marketplace and [CEO Jeff Bezos](#) in a Sunday social media post.

"All sellers must follow our selling guidelines and those who do not will be subject to action including potential removal of their account. The product in question is no longer available," Amazon said in a statement obtained by the BBC.

In addition to the item being removed, [it appears that IMERIOi](#) has either been booted from the virtual marketplace or decided to personally suspend their third-party sales with the website. As of this article's publication, shoppers attempting to [access the vendor's storefront](#) are met with zero results.

This recent backlash came a little over a month after Amazon's UK site was called out for marketing Floren dress shoes [in the color "n****r-brown."](#)

David Lammy, a Labour MP for Tottenham, argued that while it was great that Amazon responded and took down the item, the company needs to implement a better vetting process so that similar situations can be avoided in the future.

"[G]iven the item has been on sale since March what systems do you have in place for reviewing descriptions and not allowing offensive terms to be posted in the first place?" he [asked on Twitter](#). "This is not the first time."

Despite continued criticism, it's unlikely that Amazon will face any economic backlash - especially with its upcoming "Amazon Prime Day," a 48-hour event that [reportedly raked in \\$7 billion](#) in sales last year. Though the online vendor's annual sale usually takes place in July, it has been pushed back to October 13 this year, [according to CNET](#).

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Maduro Accuses US of Allowing CIA to Carry Out 'Terrorist' Actions in Venezuela by [Evan Craighead](#)

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro claims that US President Donald Trump's administration gave its approval to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to carry out recent "covert and terrorist operations" against an array of targets in the country.

"They have given the CIA the green light to come with direct agents to covert and terrorist operations against oil, electricity, military, electoral targets and other dirty covert actions like those used by the CIA," he told state television in Spanish on Tuesday, speaking of the Trump administration.

This comes amid a [series of developments](#) that followed the capture of an alleged US spy near Venezuela's largest oil refinery earlier this month.

Following [an investigation](#) into the matter, the [Venezuelan president claimed](#) that the spy, who was arrested alongside three others in Falcón State, served as a communications operator at a CIA base in Iraq between 2006 and 2016.

Maduro Takes Aim at US DEA

Maduro also reiterated accusations against the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), which he claims has been used by the White House to attack Venezuela and overthrow Caracas.

"It has placed the DEA as the operator agency of the attack against Venezuela, what is new today is not that the DEA is involved with the Colombian drug trafficking group to attack Venezuela, the new thing is that they have approved that the CIA get involved in operations terrorist attacks against Venezuela," he stated on Tuesday.

[Earlier this year](#), a group of 13 individuals were captured by Venezuelan security forces. Two of the 13 detainees were later identified as US citizens Luke Denman and Airan Barry.

A testimony published soon after showed a detainee claiming the group was made up of "intermediaries of the security chief of the #USA president, they say they are from the security advisory of Donald Trump," according to a translated tweet.

Venezuelan Interior Minister Nestor Reverol [claimed that one of the men](#) was a DEA agent. However, the DEA has denied these allegations.

Colombia Preparing Attack on Venezuela After US Imposes New Sanctions

Maduro also warned on Tuesday that Colombian President Iván Duque has been recruiting drug smugglers ahead of a planned attack on Venezuela.

"Iván Duque is directly articulating the drug trafficking gangs and has placed the drug trafficking gangs of La Guajira and other places to prepare his group of hit men and terrorists to come and attack Venezuela in the coming weeks," he claimed.

Maduro's announcement of this anticipated attack comes a day after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [announced new sanctions](#) against the Venezuelan president, as well as against the the Iranian Defense Ministry and other Iranian officials.

"For nearly two years, corrupt officials in Tehran had worked with the illegitimate regime in Venezuela to flout the UN arms embargo," [Pompeo said on Monday](#).

The Venezuelan president and 14 present and past government officials were previously indicted by the [US Department of Justice](#) on narcoterrorism charges.

The Trump administration has also offered a \$15 million reward for information leading to the arrest of Maduro. Allies of the president, like [Supreme Tribunal of Justice President Maikel Moreno](#), also had multi-million-dollar bounties placed on them by the US government.

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Facebook Prepared to 'Restrict' Content Circulation if US Election Descends Into Online Chaos by [Evan Craighead](#)

Facebook will take an array of measures to “restrict the circulation of content” if the November 3 US presidential election devolves into chaos and unrest, according to a Tuesday report by the Financial Times.

Former UK member of parliament Nick Clegg, Facebook’s vice president for global affairs and communications risk management, [told the Financial Times](#) that risk management is one of the company’s utmost concerns related to the upcoming presidential election.

Without getting into explicit details, Clegg noted that Facebook, which also owns the social media platform Instagram, has formulated a variety of plans based on possible unrest or other “political dilemmas,” such as the counting of in-person ballots versus mail-in ballots.

Facebook has yet to expound on Clegg’s comments.

US President Donald Trump has [increased his use of other online platforms - like YouTube](#) - after Twitter moved to flag several of his tweets, including one expressing his [support of shooting American citizens](#) as a response to looting in Minneapolis, Minnesota, earlier this year. Facebook was criticized for its slowness to act by major outlets such as [CNN Business](#), which ran the headline “Mark Zuckerberg silent as Trump uses Facebook and Instagram to threaten 'looting' will lead to 'shooting.'”

As it pertains to the upcoming November presidential election, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg detailed in a [September 3 Facebook post](#) that “this election is not going to be business as usual.” “These changes reflect what we’ve learned from our elections work over the past four years and the conversations we’ve had with voting rights experts and our civil rights auditors,” he clarified. [One of these changes](#) is a policy that prohibits “new political ads in the week before the election.”

Citing former Facebook executive Alex Stamos, the [New York Times reported](#) in August that Facebook, Twitter and YouTube faced a common risk-management situation in which they would “have to potentially treat the president as a bad actor” if he casts doubt on the legitimacy of the election.

“We don’t have experience with that in the United States,” added Stamos, who presently serves as director of [Stanford University’s Internet Observatory](#). Stamos was Facebook’s security chief between 2015 and 2017, during the Cambridge Analytica scandal, in which some [87 million users](#) had their personal information collected and used, [most without their knowledge or consent](#), by companies intending on helping candidates like Trump shape elections in their favor.

